

3/19/2019

HB 7192 An Act Concerning Municipal and Regional Opportunities and Efficiencies- Strongly Opposed

Dear Honorable Co-chairs Representative McCarthy Vehey and Senator Cassano, Vice- Chairs Representative Baker and Senator Bradley, Ranking Members Senator Champagne and Representative Zawistowski and other Members of the Planning and Development Committee:

I am strongly opposed to wording in Section 7-10 of HB 7192. My major objection is that it would provide a path to school redistricting and consolidation, but it that will not lead to more efficiency. I have spoken out and submitted testimony previously about wording in another bill currently before this committee (3/15/2019- HRB 7319) and three before the Education Committee (3/1/2019-SB 457, SB738 and Sec 1-4 of Bill 874) that refer to plans for study and/or implementation of commissions necessary to begin redistricting and/or consolidation of schools in Connecticut. I am also vehemently against disassociating school districts from their municipalities and creating separate taxing and bonding ability for the same.

Today I have multiple concerns about Sec 7-10 of HB because of the “redistricting” and “consolidation” language and the power given to Commissions to do the same:

This new Commission on Shared School Services would be given the mandate to redistrict or consolidate school services AND school districts. The word "redistricting" and "consolidating" are repeated seven times in section 7 to 10. However, nowhere in HB 7192 is there any mention of educational outcomes as a reason for redistricting or consolidation of schools. Consolidation of school systems has only shown to have an educational benefit in smaller districts from 300-1500 students. Mid sized districts with 2000-4000 students on average are known to provide the best chance of success for children. Many of the districts that have such a structure are thriving. Why touch something that is not broken? Why not work to spend money to fix the problems in failing schools? Money and time would be better spent to provide the solutions to problems that may have tangible solutions. The 2013 Seton Hall study “The Educational Case against School District Consolidation” referenced the following as major predictors of poor school performance and proficiency: poor Attendance, increased overall student mobility, high student to faculty ratio, increased faculty mobility, low median faculty experience, low total cost spent per pupil, and economic class of the district. District structures were found to have very little to do with academic outcomes for students. As far as consolidation for efficiencies, the Syracuse University Center for Policy and Research has shown no increase in cost effectiveness in districts larger than 1500 students.

Putting data together from the Hartford Foundation, the Syracuse Study, the Seton Hall Study, and multiple states similar to our own that have studied school consolidation and efficiencies, it appears that midsized school districts and local control seem to have the best educational outcomes and cost effectiveness. Large districts just tend to lead to more top-heavy administrative personnel and consolidation also leads to leveling up of all salaries. Large districts are too hard for parents to navigate and lead to mistrust and parent apathy.

In addition the bill does not clearly state whether the Legislature will get to vote on any plan developed by the Commission. This is a direct violation of the sacred trust the people have of the legislature and does not uphold the standards of a democratic government. The Commission would consist of 14 members ALL appointed by the Leaders of the Legislature and the Governor (Line 450-477) and would exist over eight years and span many administrations. Additionally parents and citizens alike will not have control in the formation of the Commission. Of the 14 members, only one member is required to be a parent of a student enrolled in a public school. This bill opens the way for a new educational policy where decisions are made by only a handful of people. It is policy routed in the ideals of Socialism with a capital "S" and aims to start forming a new political class that serve the government alone. When there is a top down political approach the citizens do not buy into it and money is wasted on consultants and pet projects that do little to improve the outcomes for students. Just look at what happened in Newark with 100 million dollars of seed money and a billion dollar budget when a top down approach was tried, very little improvement and most of the money wasted on consultants.

I also suspect these "education" bills we are seeing in the legislature this year are really "jobs" bills or companions to jobs bills and do not aim to improve education at all, but rather to find jobs for lower level and midlevel government workers and a few political appointees at the upper level. I would prefer we focus on the students when talking about education and look to create jobs in the private sector. Upward socioeconomic mobility is perhaps the greatest gift in terms of education and health outcomes we can give families now. For these reasons I am asking you to please reject language in HB 7192 that includes any mention of redistricting of school or forced consolidation of school districts.

Sincerely,
Karen R. Silverberg
Wilton, Ct